

SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA'S EXPANDING BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

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Boucher's Recent Work Brings Broadband to Communities across Ninth District

More than fifteen years ago, I encouraged local governments throughout the Ninth District to find a means of deploying broadband networks so that affordable high-speed Internet access would be available to businesses and residents throughout our region. My goal in making this recommendation was to set our region apart in comparison to other rural areas of the nation, to make us more attractive than the typical rural region to industries looking to expand their operations into new locations, and to create technology-based jobs for Southwest Virginians.

Today, I am pleased to note that many of the communities in our region are making great strides in deploying high-speed Internet access services. Last week we marked two major milestones in our efforts to expand the region's broadband infrastructure with plans to construct fiber-to-the-premise networks.

First, I announced the largest federal investment in our region in recent years—a total of \$45 million to install 1,746 miles of fiber-optic cable to bring last-mile high-speed Internet access services to thousands of homes and hundreds of businesses in Lee, Wise and Scott Counties and the City of Norton.

The federal funds will be provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service. A total of more than \$20 million has been provided to LENOWISCO Planning District Commission and Sunset Digital to construct a fiber-to-the-premise network 889 miles in length to bring broadband directly to 2,500 homes and businesses in a 16 community area throughout Lee and Wise Counties and the City of Norton.

A total of more than \$24 million has been provided to Scott County Telephone Cooperative to construct a fiber-to-the-premise network 857 miles in length in the southern portion of Scott County. As a result, 4,873 homes and 100 businesses will receive high-speed Internet services in the communities of Hiltons, Kermit, Morrison City, Wadlow Gap, Stanley Valley, Possum Creek, Williams Mill, Fairview, Robinette Valley and Dungannon.

Later that week, I joined with Alleghany County and NTELOS officials in announcing plans to provide broadband services directly to more than 4,000 homes and 200 businesses in Alleghany County. I have been working with Alleghany County leaders for several years to secure the federal funds needed to expand the County's broadband infrastructure, and, as a result of that work, we secured more than \$8 million in federal funds for the construction of a fiber-to-the-premise network in the County. The new network will provide many residents with high-speed Internet access services for the first time and will provide better Internet services for others.

These recent successes come on top of two announcements of federal funds last month that will expand Southwest Virginia's middle-mile fiber-optic network with the goal of spurring new connections. With federal funds of \$9.2 million awarded to Citizens Telephone Cooperative and federal funds in the amount of \$22.7 million awarded to Bristol Virginia Utilities, extensive middle-mile fiber-optic networks will be built throughout Dickenson, Buchanan, Russell, Tazewell, Washington, Smyth, Wythe, Bland, Pulaski, Giles, Floyd, Montgomery and Roanoke Counties and the City of Radford.

With the middle-mile fiber optic networks in place, it will be possible to provide last-mile connections to bring high-speed Internet access services to thousands of additional homes and businesses that do not have broadband today.

Just as first canals, then railroads and then highways were the major arteries of commerce in earlier eras, in the 21st Century, access to broadband will be a defining feature of economic success for rural communities. Companies that have located in our area including Northrop Grumman, CGI-AMS, DIRECTV and many others have cited the region's growing broadband network as a major factor in their location of operations in our region. Step by positive step our expanding broadband infrastructure is assuring that Southwest Virginia's communities will be at the center of economic opportunity.

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